

Take A Hike

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Are you one of those hardy souls who enjoy the great outdoors during winter? Sure, the Army trained you to work and fight in the cold, but what about when you're off duty, hiking or backpacking with friends or family? Do you remember to plan for the cold weather hazards? And what about the people hiking or camping with you? How well trained are they to survive? To ensure your visit to the outdoors ends happily, here are some tips derived from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation:

- Plan your trip well in advance and leave a trail plan with someone at home and, as a backup, a friend or co-worker. Don't overestimate your stamina, and choose a reasonable daily destination. Stay in good physical shape and get plenty of rest. If you're hiking a trail, sign in at all trailhead registers on your route.
- Be familiar with your area of travel. Obtain up-to-date maps and take them with you. Check your maps often and stay oriented.
- Avoid traveling alone. As a minimum, travel in a group of three or more. If a hiker is injured, a member of the group can stay with the victim while the others seek help.
- Carry gear suitable for changing weather conditions including rain and snow. If you're planning an overnight trip, take a tent, space blanket or good tarp for shelter. Also bring a stove, good rain gear, wool pants, a hat, a sweater and a change of dry clothes for the cold. Always wear wool or appropriate synthetics, as cotton does not insulate when wet; it actually draws heat away from the body. Also, every group of day hikers should carry at least one sleeping bag in case of an emergency. Should someone be unable to get to shelter, the bag can help keep them warm.
- Bring plenty of high-energy foods such as cereal, granola bars, dried fruit and nuts to snack on while traveling. Drink lots of fluids to prevent dehydration.
- Camp early and set up well before dark or at the first sign of stormy weather. Keep your group together, especially toward the end of the day.
- Don't take unnecessary chances or push too hard. Abandon the trip if anyone becomes sick or bad weather sets in. Know your group's limitations and make modifications as necessary. The mountain, lake, river or trail will still be there for the next trip.
- If you think you're lost, STOP AND SIT DOWN. Try to think calmly, refer to your map and compass and check for landmarks. Don't continue traveling unless you know where you are. The other members of your group also should stay put; remember, there's a leader in every team, and sometimes that leader has to be you.



- If you're indeed lost, **STAY IN ONE PLACE**. Put out signals in threes: three yells, whistle blasts, gunshots or columns of smoke. Any signal of three is a standard distress signal. Make your area and yourself highly visible. Also ensure children know what to do if they get lost.
- Each person should carry a survival kit that includes the following items as a minimum: map, compass, signal mirror, matches, whistle, enough change for a pay phone, flashlight, rope, space blanket, raingear, extra wool sweater and snacks. Carry a cell phone or, better yet, look into renting a satellite phone so you can call for help if needed. Following these steps can lead to a fun, safe and successful winter outing. Use Composite Risk Management to assess the hazards and develop countermeasures to reduce or eliminate them. And when you're warm and cozy back home, take a few minutes to remember the great time you had thanks to your CRM skill!

---FYI: Visit the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's Web site at <http://www.dec.state.ny.us> for more outdoor safety tips. Additional information on hypothermia and other cold weather injuries can be found on the U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine Web site at <http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil/coldinjury>.